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Vic Matus

July 6, 2025



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Next week marks the one-year anniversary of the attempt on President Trump's life at a rally in Pennsylvania. One reporter who was standing within earshot—literally—was Salena Zito. Her new book, ***Butler: The Untold Story of the Near Assassination of Donald Trump and the Fight for America's Heartland***, comes out Tuesday. **David J. Garrow** gives us the [review](#).

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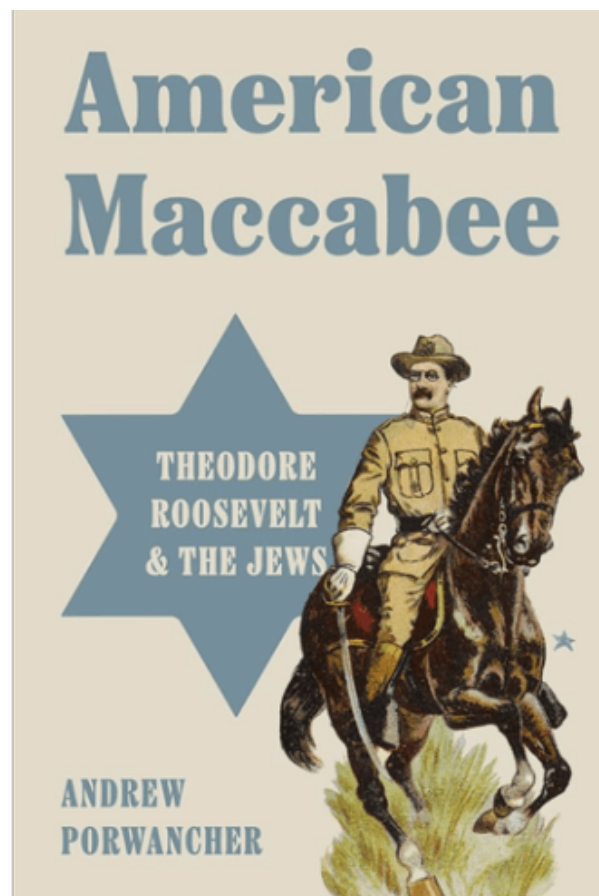
"On July 13, 2024, Zito was in Butler, Pa., to interview Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump right after an outdoor rally at the county Farm Show Complex. When Trump narrowly avoided death as a gunman's bullet nipped his right ear, Zito was just feet away. A memorable Associated Press photograph shows her splayed out face-down on the ground, easily identifiable to friends and fans by her signature tricolor cowboy boots.

"But the following day was almost equally unforgettable. 'Good morning, Salena! It's Donald Trump. I wanted to see if you and your daughter Shannon and Michael are okay. And I wanted to apologize that we weren't able to do the interview.' Zito was stunned; her photojournalist daughter and son-in-law had been introduced to Trump just before the rally, too.

"'All due respect, Mr. President, but are you fucking kidding me? You've just been shot; I was only near you.' Trump had uncharacteristically turned his head just before the bullet arrived, and he remembered that: 'If I had done things the way I always do, the way I planned to, that bullet would have struck between both ears, not just whacking one ear.'

"But one of gunman Thomas Crooks's eight shots killed local firefighter Corey Comperatore, who had been seated with his family in the adjacent grandstand, and that death troubled Trump at least as much as his own narrow escape. 'He called me seven more times that day, each call lasting around ten minutes,' Zito astonishingly recounts. 'God. The hand of God,' Trump told her. 'I cannot dismiss that God has been with me.' But Comperatore's death 'haunted him—that was a bullet meant for him,' Zito reflects. 'Someone died because they supported him,' and 'the person who died could have been him.'"

William McKinley was not so fortunate. His assassination paved the way for Teddy Roosevelt, which brings me to **Tevi Troy's** [review](#) of ***American Maccabee: Theodore Roosevelt and the Jews*** by Andrew Porwancher.



"Roosevelt welcomed Jews to the New York City Police Department when he was its commissioner. One of the Jewish officers he elevated, Otto Raphael, was a hero whom Roosevelt invited to join the force after he helped save people from a burning building. Raphael developed such a close relationship with Roosevelt that he even served as a guardian over TR's body when the former president died in January 1919.

"Roosevelt used the 'Maccabee' type—his word—Jewish officers he hired to his political advantage. When Hermann Ahlwardt, an anti-Semitic German rabble-rouser, came to New York, Roosevelt made sure to give him a protective phalanx of the most Jewish-looking officers he could find. Roosevelt continued to advance Jews during his stint with the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War, fighting alongside a Jewish soldier named Sam Greenwald, and helping him earn a promotion.

"As president, Roosevelt had an unofficial Jewish kitchen cabinet. Members included Jacob Schiff, Oscar Straus, congressman and Harvard mate Lucius 'Litt' Littauer, and Simon Wolf. Later, Roosevelt nominated Straus to be the secretary of commerce and labor—the first Jewish cabinet secretary in U.S. history. ... Jews were also important in regard to America's relations with Russia. Then, as now, Russia was a problematic actor on the international stage. There were multiple pogroms during the Roosevelt years, and Roosevelt was torn between condemning them—which infuriated the Russians, and also opened up accusations of American hypocrisy because of lynching in the United States—

and remaining silent, which rightly infuriated American Jews. Roosevelt tried to maintain a middle line on this issue, sometimes angering the Jews and sometimes angering the Russians, but Russian malfeasance against Jews was so common and so frequent that this was a constant tension within the Roosevelt presidency. Porwancher demonstrates Roosevelt's frustration with the Russians with the following quote, which could probably have also been said by every subsequent American president and additional ones in the future: 'What I cannot understand about the Russian is the way he will lie when he knows perfectly well that you know he is lying.'

From the Hero of San Juan Hill to the heroes of Operation Iraqi Freedom, **Mark Lee Greenblatt**[reviews](#) Gregg Zoroya's ***Unremitting: The Marine "Bastard" Battalion and the Savage Battle that Marked the True Start of America's War in Iraq.***



"Zoroya takes readers back to the spring and summer of 2004, a dark time for the United States as the situation in Iraq deteriorated drastically. The insurgency was growing in scope and intensity, with particularly harsh fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi—the 2/4 suffers casualty after casualty from IEDs and roadside bombings, ambushes, and intense firefights.

"There are numerous harrowing episodes sprinkled throughout, like the story of two young Marines trapped in a carport in the middle of some godforsaken Ramadi neighborhood, cut off from their squad, and surrounded by enemy fighters. Or the young Marine all alone in an abandoned house, shot in both arms with enemy fighters advancing in an unrelenting and terrifying march toward him. Or the hidden sniper team of four Marines who was spotted by an Iraqi child and the teams' gut-wrenching discussions on how to handle the situation.

"Readers have to wonder: *Would I have the self-control to survive that moment?* The answer for these young Marines was an emphatic 'Yes.' And that is one heartbreaking aspect of the story: just how *young* these Marines were, 18- and 19-year-olds making life-or-death decisions and being thrust into unimaginable situations."

On a lesser scale of sacrifice—but a sacrifice nonetheless!—our **Andrew Stiles** found the strength and determination to [review](#) James Comey's latest crime novel, *FDR Drive*.



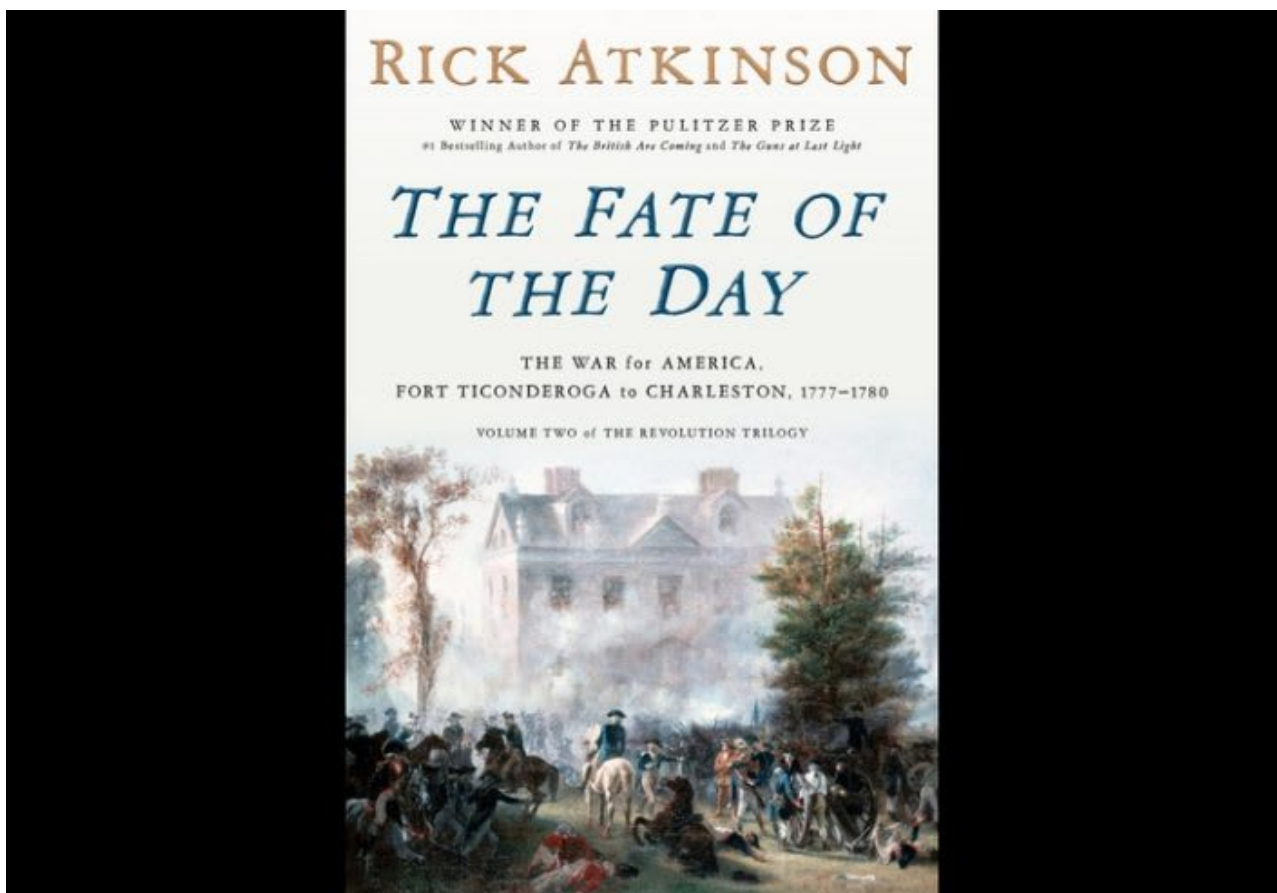
"The plot unfolds like a bad *Law & Order* episode. The characters, even the main ones, are emotionally vacant drones who all get along and are cloyingly agreeable, constantly referring to each other as 'my beloved' something or other. Benny Dugan steals the show as the grizzled ex-cop with a heart of gold who isn't afraid to cry thick, manly tears and is eager to learn how to pronounce 'Mx.,' the nonbinary honorific. 'More opportunities for growth,' he bellows in his 'Brooklyn baritone.' ... He makes a reference to Lisa Leslie, the former WNBA 'star,' and rarely ends a sentence without a variation of the phrase, 'or some shit.' Dugan has no time for those who criticize the FBI's relentless prosecution of anyone who set foot in the Capitol building on January 6, but he's also quick to acknowledge—in his overwrought, cliché-driven parlance—that the bureau is rife with systemic racism. 'If this was some Muslim dude saying the shit Buchanan's been saying—with bodies fallin'—the FBI'd be on him like white on rice,' he grumbles.

"Comey is presumably trying to make an argument about free speech, but it's not clear what that is beyond a brooding lament that authorities should be doing more to stop the people he doesn't like from saying things he doesn't agree with, even if it means utilizing sketchy tactics or even breaking the law. Nora and her team of prosecutors base their

case against Buchanan, who is arrested and denied bail with ruthless efficiency, on the airtight legal theory that the MAGA podcaster '*had* to know his words would result in the attacks.' (Italics in original.)

"Just in case, they deploy a manipulative jailhouse snitch with a checkered past to secretly record him appearing to admit his guilt. They are eventually tasked with building another case against Buchanan's financial backer, an obscure timber magnate supervillain who is shorting the American economy and secretly wants the country to collapse so he can use the profits to rebuild society into a MAGA paradise. They are only able to do so because Buchanan's defense attorney, a nice woke guy who hates his 'guilty piece of shit' client and his following of 'mouth breathers married to their first cousins,' commits legal malpractice and ultimately lies under oath. But the good guys won, so who cares?"

From the archives: Besides watching *Independence Day* for the hundredth time this weekend, maybe check out Rick Atkinson's new history of the Revolutionary War, *The Fate of the Day: The War for America, Fort Ticonderoga to Charleston, 1777-1780*. Award-winning historian and Weekend Beacon contributor **Allen C. Guelzo** gave us the [review](#).



"The British generals to whom this task was given—Sir William Howe, Sir Henry Clinton, Earl Cornwallis, 'Gentlemanly Johnny' Burgoyne—were neither nitwits nor tyrants, and if we are to judge by the opening chapters of *The Fate of the Day*, they were remarkably close to winning their war in 1777. Burgoyne's capture of Fort Ticonderoga in July 1777 should have guaranteed the success of his plan to move down the Hudson River Valley

and cut off rebellious New England from the rest of the American rebel states; Howe's dramatic combined-arms operation to capture Philadelphia steamrolled George Washington's Continental Army at Brandywine in September, threw off a counterattack at Germantown in October, and consigned the Continentals to their dreadful winter encampment at Valley Forge.

"But Howe's adventure to Philadelphia left him unable to support Burgoyne when 'Gentlemanly Johnny' was forced into surrender at Saratoga in October 1777. Howe himself had already concluded that the war was unwinnable and never lifted a finger to disturb Washington at Valley Forge. The Saratoga victory convinced the French that the British were vulnerable to a serious effort to recover France's New World empire, and with the French entrance into the war, the principal theaters of operations had to be shifted elsewhere by Britain. Britain's generals in America would still win a few dramatic victories, but they would lose the biggest battle at Yorktown in 1781, and after that, American independence only required the official stamp of the 1783 peace treaty."

Happy 4th of July weekend!

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